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ABSTRACT

New lines of understanding and self expression are two facets of drama which are useful in teaching reading and writing. Techniques of creative drama offer an engaging way of enforcing writing process concepts. Drama can be a vehicle to get listening, speaking, reading and writing to interact in a creative and holistic way. Curricular objectives in using creative drama include developing creativity, inventiveness, curiosity, questioning skills and self-perception. Guided imagery is one dramatic technique which can be used as a prereading experience, a prewriting or brainstorming experience, as the beginning of the writing process, and to develop listening and speaking skills. Steps in guided imagery include: (1) breathing exercises; (2) setting the stage; (3) use of words suggesting the 5 senses; and (4) debriefing. Allowing students to use their imaginations through guided imagery can foster new ideas, which aids the development of communication skills, both oral and written. Contains 11 references. (EF)

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Using Creative Drama in the Writing and Reading Process
by
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Using creative drama in the classroom can be a useful tool in developing creativity and imagination. The excitement of building new lines of understanding and self expression lends itself to the use of drama in the classroom and the teaching of the reading writing process.

Drama in the Writing Process

Since the writing process encompasses prewriting (brainstorming), writing, editing, rewriting and publishing, creative drama techniques can help in the enforcement of the writing process concepts. I have found that teaching writing using the writing process makes a substantial difference in the quality of students' writing. But even with putting the writing process in place and practicing writing workshop techniques is sometimes still not enough to keep our students actively engaged in writing.

Student Problems in Writing

One of the most difficult parts in the teaching of the writing process is for students to be able to discover or find a topic to write about. Even brainstorming and semantic mapping techniques sometimes prove redundant after a while. I have had students say that they lead boring lives, that nothing happens to them and that there is nothing that they are interested in writing about. It can become equally difficult to get students to feel secure enough to put their ideas into words and to edit and

restructure what they have written. In order to keep student interest at a high level of motivation, teachers can learn ways of validating the use of students' imagination and creativity. If we can show students' their ability at discovering that they have an imagination and get them to talk about their imaginings, we can quite possibly get them to write about them. Once students become engaged with their imagination, they can learn how to focus on their imaginative thoughts and develop these thoughts into creative results.

Writing, Communication and Drama

We first must remember that language arts consists of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Tomkins, 1998). None of these elements stand alone. When teaching writing, it is important to remember that it is a form of communication, as is listening, reading and speaking. "Writing is also a fundamentally creative process (Fearn,Leif & Farnan,Nancy 1998)" that can be taught through the use of drama. Drama can be a vehicle to get these four forms of communication to interact with each other in a creative and holistic way. When drama is practiced as a classroom methodology, students become holistically involved in using their imagination and creativity as part of the learning process.

Drama Objectives

There are many curricular objectives in using creative drama. Drama helps to develop creativity and inventiveness and curiosity. It teaches students to question and develop self-perception and

visualization.

"Many objectives of modern education and creative drama are unquestionably shared. Among the shared objectives are:

1. Creativity and aesthetic development
2. the ability to think critically
3. social growth and the ability to work cooperatively with others
4. improved communication skills
5. the development of moral and spiritual values
6. knowledge of self. (McCaslin, 1980,p.6)"

Drama can help in the teaching of these skills through student focused experiential dramatic techniques in the classroom. One dramatic approach that can be used to teach these concepts is guided imagery.

What Is Guided Imagery?

Guided imagery is when the creative drama teacher guides or "side coaches" students on a journey through the imagination to visualize specific items or to visualize in their "mind's eye as the journey progresses. The student is permitted to create a story as the instructor only gives suggestions that are to be focused on throughout the lesson. The creative drama teacher forms the framework for the guided imagery or (fantasy) story trip, but the students are asked to supply all of the experiences, images and details of trip. It is a student focused approach to learning. It is highly creative and elicits spontaneity, not only on the part of the students, but for the instructor as well.

Uses of Guided Imagery in Reading

Guided imagery can also be used as a prereading experience. It can help set the mood and time of a story. It can help elicit empathy and understanding for the characters involved in the story, which can lead to better student analysis of character and plot development (such as understanding how Harry Potter felt when he was rejected by his guardians, the Dursleys, in the Harry Potter series,Rowling, 1999). By sharing in the characters' situation and mind-set students can learn to formulate an empathic understanding of characters and situation in any story through the use of guided imagery. Students can also learn to understand elements of story through guided imagery by getting in touch with their own imagination and creativity in development of plot, theme, mood and setting. And they can learn to create their own stories. Their stories can be told orally in the classroom and can be written down. Along with theme, mood and setting, time and place, and point of view can be better understood through this student focused exercise in visualization. As an aid in the reading process, students can be taught to visualize through guided imagery exercises as they are creating images in the "mind's eye" prior to their reading assignments. Topics for reading and writing can be created from using this approach. Students are tapping into their own creativity and imagination finding a topics to read and write about. Instead of using someone elses ideas, they are taught to use their own ideas in topical research of reading and writing. Guided imagery can also be

used as a prewriting or brainstorming experience, which is the beginning of the writing process. The use of guided imagery in the classroom can help students discover their hidden potential for finding a topic for writing and also for developing a story. Just as students are connected to the outside world through reading and writing; guided imagery helps them to connect to the inside world of character, plot, theme and imagination.

Listening and Speaking Through Drama

Listening and speaking skills can also be developed with the use of guided imagery. The students must focus, and listen to the creative drama teacher for exact directions. Students are encouraged to share and to listen to the experiences of others in the class as the exercise is debriefed or talked about. It is important that the students discuss the guided imagery in detail before they begin to write about it. Only then are they encouraged to write about the visualization.

Procedures For Using Guided Imagery

1. Breathing exercise-Have students relax and breathe from the diaphragm. When inhaling the breath should fill the stomach and the back. When exhaling the breath releases and the stomach and back are constricted. Sometimes it helps to have students place their hands on their stomach in order to feel the breath as it enters and exits the body.

2. Set the stage/mood--Using a calming voice, tell the students what they are to do. If you are going to have them work with an

imaginary object ask them to visualize the object and describe the object using the five senses. The same is true if you are having them participate on a guided imagery trip. Never ask them to pretend. Words used by the creative drama teacher using guided imagery technique should always encourage students to focus on the visualization not on the pretense of the visualization. Word suggestions should always be clear and deliberate.

3. As the exercise progresses the creative drama teacher must use words suggesting the use of the five senses. The students should be asked how they feel as they are moving through the imaginative drama. They need to be asked what they see, smell, taste, touch and hear all in relationship to what they are experiencing on the guided imagery trip.

4. Debriefing--Discussion of the exercise should take place after all creative drama exercises. Students need to be asked the following in a non threatening way: How do you feel? What did you see? What did you hear? What did you smell? What did you taste? Every answer has merit. There is no right or wrong answer-the debriefing is non judgmental. This type of debriefing is done in order to encourage the student to take risks and to build self esteem. After the students are asked to discuss and share their visualization they will be asked to form a graphic organizer of their own, by listing the five senses and their feelings and writing down any items from the visualization that relate to the senses. From the graphic organizer they will be asked to write about their experience into a rough draft, then

edited and rewritten for publication. The writing process will be in set in place. Finished papers will be shared by the class.

The Importance of Guided Imagery

Visualizing and imaging are used almost simultaneously as the use of guided imagery is implemented in the teaching of writing. Using guided imagery (Polsky, p.8) is a very effective way to have each student get in touch with something we all possess, and yet too often negate, our imagination. While engaging in the fantasy, students can learn to accept the visualization that their "mind's eye" has developed for them. They can create their own visualization and story situation within the boundaries that the creative drama teacher describes. When students are feeling confident that they can anticipate what is going to happen next in a story through their mind pictures (Cecil, Nancy & Lauritzen, Phyllis 1994); it is in these types of situations that the student can be not only creative, but can also be in tune with emotions and intuition. If students are shown how to tap into their imagination, and are permitted to discuss their imaginative thoughts in a non threatening way in class with the teacher as guide, this can become the source of developing communication and the spawning of new ideas which lead to not only to the development of oral skills but written skills as well.

Just Imagine

> "Imagination creates things that can be or can happen whereas fantasy invents things that are not in existence, which never have been or will be. When fantasy created the Flying

Carpet, who could have thought that one day we would be winging our way through space?" (Stanislavski, p. 52) Both fantasy and imagination are indispensable in the creative act. Since writing is a creative act, and imagination is one of the greatest sources of creativity, why not use it productively in the classroom by allowing students to dream and fantasize and putting these ideas down on paper. Guided imagery is a way of accomplishing this.

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